

## FROM SPIRITUALISM TO RATIONALISM TO SPIRITUALISM

*The West's parabolic cultural journey out of the Middle Ages & into tomorrow has been, of late, richly & much chronicled. We post-moderns are rejoicing in the Spirit's new window of opportunity today, while hang-on moderns are saying that the whole post-modern notion is an illusion, only the language is shifting (not the landscape), the upsurge of some new secular hope will sink the ship of "the new spirituality," an improvement in the economy will prove that the revived interest in spirituality was only a blink between two materialist-consumerist periods, &/or the real interest is not in anything previously recognizable as spiritual but only in a neo-mythical eudemonism (Jos. Campbell's "Follow your bliss," Sam Keen's "Program your own software"). But I believe "The Spirit is amoverin', amoverin', amoverin'...."*

1 One characteristic of modernism is that, reason being its deity, all that threatens it is condemned as **irrational**. Considered as an irruption of the irrational, Hashoah-Holocaust is horrible. But suppose you consider it, as I do, a pinnacle of rationality? Is it not then even more horrible? For then, in addition to being a swamp of inhumanity, it is an abyss of reason. The highest-achieving people in reason (philosophy, mathematics, science, technology), the Germans coordinated all the products of reason through ecopolitical structures & highly rationalized psychosocial processes to produce a demonic miracle of people-destruction. The death camps were paradoxically both the pinnacle of reason (as synergistic achievement) & the abyss of reason (as the fulfilled potential of reason divorced from humane faith & married to primitive ethnic myth)....Of course both are true. In Hitler, the irrational did irrupt; but--my point--it irrupted into, & swamped, human society, the continent of Europe, through the gate of reason at its highest historical level of articulation. Nazi thinking was "banal" (Hannah Arendt) in that it was normal rational thinking given the Rosenberg premises. Premises rest on paradigms, which rest on faith-commitment, as all ages of faith (& no age of reason) know. Faith says reason is rationalism, it is a tool for making sense & use of a vision unacquired by, unacquirable by, reason. *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe so I may understand).

In a 1990 Princeton UP book, Jewish scholar Paul Lawrence Rose maps the rational progress of Jew-hate from Christian antisemitism into "enlightened" philosophical antisemitism, then into atheistic social radicalism, & finally into extreme racism & barbarism. (I must add: Careful scholarship indicates that Christianity carried, & augmented, the pre-Christian pagan virus of antisemitism. To believe that antisemitism is Christian in origin is as evil & corrupting as to believe that the Protocols of Zion are not fraudulent.) Under the secularized myth of "Revolution" (Kant, Herder, Hegel, Bauer, Marx, Hess, Frantz, Wagner), Jews were condemned as "stubborn" not for refusing to convert to Christianity but for their "egoistic" & "loveless" rejection of the freedom they could have known had they embraced the "life-force of history and progress." So the Germans on left & right decided on Jewish destruction in the name of "humanity," "freedom," & "reason."

2 Under pre-modern spiritualism, nature, religion, & politics formed a unified system with a single hermeneutic (interpretive code for linkages). Reason served less as a stimulant to explorative thinking than as a co- & ad-hesive, an intellectual warranty of the system's integrity. Reason functioned as the system-paradigm's centripetal force, so every rational exploration launched into the space beyond the system was experienced as centrifugal even if only in orbit.

Then, during the second half of the 17th c., the system exploded into three fragments--"nature" ("science" free from religion & politics), religion (becoming an enclave separate from science &, with greater pain, from politics), & politics (freed from scientific & religious constraints). Only now are we beginning to comprehend that many pains of each of the three are radial from the other two & that much of the suffering of each derives from its separation from the other two. What to do about it is another matter. But the awareness of the roots of the disease of modernity is distinctly post-modern, & at least a crack in the door into a new age of the Spirit. Our Craigville Theological Colloquy this summer (July 22-26, "The Holy Spirit in Creation, Truth, and Power") points toward the **new integration** of nature, religion, & politics that post-modern spiritualism will foster.

3 This morning I interviewed the Rev. G. Peter Fleck, a Unitarian-Universalist minister nearing his 80th birthday. His life is a parable of the inadequacies &

tragedies, rationalism's failure to satisfy the human heart. Born in Holland, of an upperclass Enlightenment family two generations deracinated from observant Judaism, he became, by age 27, vice president of the world's most prestigious investment banking firm, Banque Rothschild. His parent's religion was science, which (he says of their faith) "would in the long run replace religion." But a Lutheran family nurse read him stories from a children's Bible, & his parents got worried because he was "preaching about the cynical nature of man and the need for redemption" ("Combining Words & Deeds," p.5 of the 15 Dec 87 CAPE CODDER). Previously unchurched, they started taking him to a humanist church, but its "coldness" turned him off: "I felt emotional about religion." His experience in a Dutch Reformed Sunday school, which did have some spiritual warmth, wasn't much better. That Sunday school tried "unsuccessfully" to combine evolution & creation, & his 12-year-old brilliant mind couldn't accept the seeming contradiction & the intellectual mishmash of the failed efforts to overcome it. This morning I said that at age 12, confronting the divide (evolution in public school, creation in Sunday school), I came down on the side of creation. I told him this & asked which side he came down on. "No side," said he. He concluded that the adult world was crazy--his "upbringing violated" in church, & his spiritual hunger denied at home & in the emotionally cold church to which he got dragged....When Hitler took Holland, Peter was a bank president & decided to remain even though his Jewish "blood" made him subject to death. But his situation soon became intolerable, so he moved to NYC, remaining with B.R. till retirement, when he was ordained as a UU minister, noted (now here on Cape Cod) through the years for human warmth, social concern, & eloquence. His books of essays are strongly Bible-based: Your choice, you take the Bible "either literally or seriously." (His wife of 50 years, Ruth, is as magnificent a human being as he, & has worked faithfully in Hospice for years with my wife Loree.)